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REMARKS

ON

Some Late Assertions

IN A

GREAT ASSEMBLY,

RELATIVE TO

EAST INDIA AFFAIRS.

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REMARKS, &c.

EVERY man muſt admit that the proper government of our dominions in the eaſt is of the utmoſt importance to the welfare of this kingdom; that the national honour and juſtice are deeply intereſted in it, and perhaps our very exiſtence as a powerful people may in great meaſure depend upon the reſources fairly and regularly drawn from that very valuable part of our remaining foreign poſſeſſions. It is likewiſe obvious that India affairs have not been conducted with ſuch wiſdom and ſucceſs as to gratify the expectations of the public; but involved as they are by party and prejudice, it is not ſo eaſy to aſſign the cauſes to which the diſappointment may be fairly attributed. It is the opinion of many that the miſmanagements ſo much complained of have principally originated from the frequent, the prejudiced, and partial interference of Parliament: in that they are confirmed by the ſentiments of one of the ableſt men this country perhaps ever ſaw. Mr. Fox, in his maſterly ſpeech, when he opened the heads of his late India bill to the Houſe, ſtated that the regulating act of 1773. had ſo en-

tirely deſtroyed the influence of the Directors over the ſervants in India, that their repeated orders had been ſet at defiance; nor were the means left with the Court of Directors to vindicate their authority: "For," ſaid Mr. Fox, "by that act not only the power of appointing, but the power of removing any members of the Supreme Council was taken away from the Court of Directors; ſo that whatever might be the conduct of the Governor General and Council, they were ſure to be continued in office, unleſs both the King's miniſters and Court of Proprietors ſhould agree with the Directors in the propriety of their diſmiſſion—a concurrence ſcarce to be expected in fluctuating bodies. It has indeed happened that two of the parties, but never that all three, have united in the expediency of ſuch removal. This extraordinary ſtate of government probably encouraged diſobedience: Even the opinion of this Houſe," ſaid Mr. Fox, "has failed of its expected influence; the General Court having dared to uphold the Governor General in his ſituation in direct oppoſition to the vote of this Houſe, that it was expedient for the Company to remove him by all lawful means." It is neceſſary in this place to remark, that the vote here alluded to paſſed when there were ſcarce ſufficient members to form a houſe; and that if the caſe had been otherwiſe, it would not have been incumbent on the India Company to have paid implicit obedience to the judgment of only a ſingle branch

branch of the legiſlature. The act of 1773. being then admitted by Mr. Fox as one great cauſe of the diſorders now ſo much complained of in India, who from ſuch premiſes would have expected the entire annihilation of the Court of Directors? One ſhould more naturally have looked for the repeal of that act, and for the revival of the former authority of the Directors over the ſervants in India, which with ſome regulations for their conduct, and with ſome reſtraint upon the general courts, might probably correct moſt of the evils, for the remedy of which the wiſeſt heads in the nation are now ſo induſtriouſly deviſing new conſtitutions and new forms of government.—Surely it might be better to revert to the Company's ancient ſyſtem—-a ſyſtem that had raiſed the Company to ſuch an amazing height of wealth and power, as had enabled them, in the war of 1755, greatly to contribute to the national honour and proſperity: even in the laſt, oppreſſed as they have been with enemies in India, it is the only part of the Britiſh empire which has been ſucceſsfully defended. The Eaſt India Company never was a popular body in this kingdom; as they encreaſed in ſtrength and opulence, and their ſervants who had run many unuſual riſques in their ſervice, partook of their proſperity, both became ſtill greater objects of envy and jealouſy; no conſideration being had of the immenſe benefits which were derived to the nation from the manly, ſpirited, and honourable

able exertions of the ſervants of the India Company: but the names of Lawrence, Clive, Pigot, Ford, Vanſittart, and many others, will be mentioned with admiration by poſterity, when the voice of Slander ſhall be forgotten.

It is not pretended but that the eſtabliſhment of a new empire like that in Aſia may have afforded ſome inſtances of irregularity; but however the actors in thoſe great ſcenes may have been defamed by party, they ſurely have had great merits; and though they have been ſubject to failings like men, it is evident that no acts of cruelty ſtained their path to conqueſt and dominion; none fell by their means, but in the field of battle, nor have any wanton ſeverities been exerciſed over the conquered inhabitant; it may be ſafely ſaid that their ſituation in general has been happier under Britiſh government, than under any which preceded it, and tho' the men who formerly held high and lucrative offices under the Soubahs of Bengal, are great ſufferers by our aſſumption of the government, yet no remedy can be given them, unleſs the legiſlature ſhall think it prudent to reſtore to the natives of India the management of the Britiſh dominions in Aſia. When reproach is caſt upon the India Company and its ſervants, let the nation recollect that the poſſeſſions in Aſia have been conquered and preſerved by their exertions and good conduct; whilſt Parliament and adminiſtration, with their united wiſdom, and the ſtrength of the kingdom, have not been

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able to retain the Britiſh colonies in America: the nation, therefore, ought to view with a very jealous eye the parliamentary executive board propoſed for the adminiſtration of India affairs, leſt the effect of the ſame ſpirit and meaſures which have loſt one part of the Britiſh dominions, ſhould ſever India alſo from this country.

It is admitted by all, that regulations for the better government of India are at preſent very much wanted; but when it is remembered that many evils confeſſedly originate in the act of 1773; and that the interference of parliament has not hitherto produced any good, the public have cauſe to dread the effect of regulations likely to be made ſo much in a ſpirit of prejudice and party, as thoſe now to be offered to the conſideration of parliament.

It is very popular in theſe times to caſt indiſcriminate reproach upon the ſervants of the India Company: but it is wonderful that a man of Mr. Fox's ability and preciſion ſhould not only chime in with the general cry of abuſes in India, but that he ſhould alſo ſuperadd an imputation upon gentlemen returned from that country, that their mode of ſpending their fortunes at home has been as devoid of credit, as were the means of acquiring them abroad. Without entering here into the mode by which fortunes in India have generally been obtained, or without admitting that they were unjuſtly gained, I can venture to contradict the latter inſinuation. From my

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own knowledge of many gentlemen returned from India, I can aſſert that their conduct in private life, in the expenditure of their fortunes, and care of their families, would not be a diſgrace to the regularity, the prudence, and economy to which Mr. Fox himſelf has ſo inviolably adhered. Their deportment, their ſentiments, their converſation, render them acceptable to the moſt reſpected ſocieties in this kingdom; nor do Mr. Fox and Mr. Burke diſdain familiar intercourſe with ſuch as aſſiſt in their political ſchemes on India. I own I feel indignant, when I hear reproaches caſt indiſcriminately on a great body of gentlemen, many of whom have confeſſedly ſerved the public with honour, and whoſe lives here are very worthy of imitation:—they are moſt of them too wiſe to gamble away the fortunes they have earned at ſo much riſque; they have too much ſpirit, and too much ſenſe to hazard their independence on a dye, or to recommend themſelves to notice by partaking of the midnight amuſements in St. James's-Street: the fortunes they have gotten, they endeavour to ſpend uſefully, honourably and prudently; yet I preſume they are ready to receive a wiſe leſſon on this ground from Mr. Fox, whenever he will pleaſe to afford it.

I cannot help thinking that Mr. Fox and many members of the Houſe allow their minds to be improperly influenced by the partial reports of the Select Committee; partial I may ſay, becauſe avowedly they record only ſuch evidence,

evidence, and ſuch facts as tend to ſupport opinions previouſly entertained. The Committee themſelves ſay, that their reports are not charges, nor do they hold themſelves bound to bring forward compleat evidence of what may tend to criminate or exculpate every perſon whoſe tranſactions they may find it expedient to report; and yet the Houſe is induced to act upon them, as upon deductions fairly and fully proved from records and compleat evidence.

A certain right hon. gentleman ſeems to delight in talking of the murders committed in India. It is wonderful that the Houſe can patiently bear to hear ſuch unſupported reproach thrown upon their countrymen. Whoever has attended much to the India reports will know, that they do not contain any proof of ſuch crimes, nor even grounds upon which ſuch ſuſpicions can be built. Why will that gentleman give ſcope to ſuch a wandering fancy? he allows it to range from Eaſt to Weſt; and now when the ſcene is cloſed in America, he returns to feed on imaginary ravages and depredations in Aſia!

In the Ninth Report of the Select Committee, where he has taken a very active part, the conduct of the Bengal council in 1763 towards Coſſim Alli Cawn is canvaſſed and cenſured in ſtrong terms: it is ſtated, that the ſervants of the Company had engroſſed the whole commerce of the country; and that the Nabob, finding his own ſubjects excluded as

aliens from the trade of the country, and the revenues of the Prince overwhelmed in the ruin of the commerce of his dominions, had recourſe to the unexpected expedient of declaring his reſolution at once to annul all duties on trade, ſetting it equally free to ſubjects and foreigners. The Committee then add, "Never was a method of defeating the oppreſſions of a monopoly more forcible, more ſimple, more equitable, nor could any plauſible objection be made to it; and yet the preſident and council of Calcutta openly denied to the prince the power of protecting the trade of his ſubjects by the remiſſion of his own duties." Whoever recollects the proceedings of thoſe times, will diſavow this doctrine of the Committee; Coſſim Alli Cawn was not the lawful ſovereign, nor could his own rebellious aſſumption of the vice-royalty of the Mogul government entitle him to make regulations ſo materially affecting the rights of foreigners, as thoſe in queſtion. Not only the Engliſh Eaſt India Company, but other foreign companies traded to Bengal under phirmaunds, confirmed by ſucceſſive Monarchs of Hindoſtan—phirmaunds obtained at great expence to the parties, and granted by the court of Delhi, on a conviction, that if ſome peculiar immunities were not granted to foreigners over the trade of the natives of Bengal, they never could be encouraged to trade there: was then the council of the Company in Bengal to ſuffer a privilege ſo important as this to be rendered nugatory by the device of a man

man raiſed to power by themſelves?—an attempt they would have reſiſted to the utmoſt of their ability, even had it flowed from the ſource of legal authority. The immunity by which they had been encouraged to ſettle in Bengal was like a charter confirmed to European companies, and too valuable an one to be tamely ſurrendered. When the ſervants of the Engliſh Company acquired great influence with the country government, it may be true, that having ſcarce any other emolument from the Company but what aroſe from the communication of this privilege, they might make too free an uſe of the immunity; but was that only to be remedied by the annihilation of the indulgence granted by the Mogul, and at the pleaſure of a viceroy created by the aſſiſtance of the company?—the very attempt added ingratitude to injuſtice!

However, the conduct of Coſſim Alli is alſo defended on this plea—that the revenues of the prince were going to ruin: but to ſhew the fallacy of theſe reports, and this argument in particular, it will ſuffice to ſay, that out of a revenue of upwards of three millions which the three Bengal provinces have annually yielded, not above two hundred thouſand pounds have ariſen from cuſtoms; ſo that the depredation on that part of the revenue could not have been felt, nor could it be his motive: beſides, it is elſewhere aſſerted by the committee, that no Soubah of Bengal ever raiſed ſo great a revenue as Coſſim Alli Cawn—

which is a flat contradiction of one of the inducements aſcribed to Coſſim Alli by the committee for laying the trade alike open to all. Probably the order, had it been acquieſced in, would not have anſwered his expectations; for we do not learn that the commerce of Bengal is become more flouriſhing ſince the Company have of themſelves renounced the exerciſe of this immunity.—Many think it has ruined the trade of Bengal, and that its revival is the moſt difficult object of the preſent intended regulations. Every good ſubject will ſupport ſuch as promiſe to enſure proſperity to our India poſſeſſions; but when a ſyſtem totally new as to men and meaſures is propoſed, the public have a right to ſcrutinize both; and after the laboured but juſt panegyric beſtowed on Lord Fitzwilliams, with an aſſurance to the Houſe that his colleagues would not be inferior in point of knowledge and ability, virtue, and diligence, they muſt be aſtoniſhed to find among the propoſed liſt of directors the names of men, who do not by any means equal the high expectation held out to the nation:—perhaps it might be fairly aſſerted that more than one of them are totally unfit for a truſt of ſuch labour, reſponſibility and patronage: To ſay more might be invidious: beſides, the inſertion of ſuch names was perhaps neceſſary to render the bill palatable to ſome of Mr. Fox's colleagues; but it is ſurely a burleſque upon all character, to hold out the ſeven propoſed by the late India bill as the moſt independent,

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the moſt wiſe, and moſt fit men in the nation for the execution of a truſt of ſuch infinite importance to the public.

The propoſed appointment of ſeven Directors may lead many to reflect on the miſchievous effects of patronage in India; but the ſubject cannot be more forcibly preſſed upon the public attention than in the words of a letter, (recorded by the Select Committee in their ſixth report) from the Governor General and Council of Bengal, dated May 1781. "The civil offices," ſay they, "of this government might be reduced to a very ſcanty number, were their exigency alone to determine the liſt of your covenanted ſervants, which at this time conſiſts of no leſs a number than two hundred and fifty-two, many of them the ſons of the firſt families of Great-Britain, and every one aſpiring to the rapid acquiſition of laaks, and to return to paſs the prime of their lives at home, as multitudes have done before them. Neither will the revenues of this country ſuffice for ſuch boundleſs pretenſions; nor are they compatible with the Company's or the national intereſts, which may eventually ſuffer as certain a ruin from the effects of private competition, and claims of patronage, as from the more dreaded calamities of war, or the other ordinary cauſes which lead to the decline of dominion. We dare not purſue this ſubject; nor could we, without a ſacrifice of our duty, with-hold this brief ſuggeſtion of it from your notice." The public are here ſufficiently

ficiently awaked to the alarming effects of patronage; and may be assured, that the evil will not be lessened by the extension of ministerial influence.

Mr. Fox, in making his objections to the accounts delivered to the House of the Company's circumstances, asserted that the sum of £. 4,200,000, lent by them to Government, for which they now only receive three *per cent.* ought not to have been stated to the credit of the Company but as so many three *per cents.*; which, at the present market-price, would only produce three fifths of the original sum.

Had it not been for a misapprehension of the fact, Mr. Fox could not have been led into so unfair a conclusion: he must have admitted, that a sum lent originally to government at six *per cent.* and from time to time reduced, as the price of new charters, to three *per cent.* had no connection whatever with our funds. The principal sum was in part mortgaged as a security to the Company's bond creditors; and whenever the exclusive right is taken from them, the principal sum must be repaid by government; therefore it was surely fair to bring the whole sum to the credit of the Company.

In enumerating the mischievous effects of the Company's government, Mr. Fox stated to the House, that the Nabob of Oude, Asoph ul Dowla, appeared to be reduced by their exactions to such distress, as to be obliged, for

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the purpoſe of paying ſome late demands on him, to borrow money at the exorbitant intereſt of two *per cent. per menſem.* It muſt be in the firſt place remarked, that it is no unuſual thing for very rich men to reſiſt lawful demands upon a plea of poverty. The famous Chezt Sing, who pretended inability to pay a demand of five laaks, is known afterwards to have offered twenty laaks as a peace-offering, and at laſt to have carried off with him an immenſe ſum in ſpecie. It is even not uncommon for men of ſome conſideration in India to ſubmit to the rod more than once in the ſame day, before they will pay an undiſputed demand for rent, while they are the whole time poſſeſſed of the means to diſcharge it, and which they will at laſt produce. The plea of poverty is therefore no proof; and as to the two *per cent. per menſem*, ſaid to be paid by the impoveriſhed Aſoph ul Dowla, gentlemen will recollect, that it is a rate of intereſt as common in that country as five *per cent.* is in this; and that the Houſe in 1773, being ſenſible of this circumſtance, paſſed an act to limit Europeans to an intereſt of 12 *per cent. per annum*, which in India they are now authorized to receive. It is ſurpriſing, therefore, that ſuch a miſrepreſentation could have been made to the Houſe without contradiction.—To poiſon the minds of the public ſtill more againſt the Company's government, Mr. Fox read a letter from a Major Beaujou; who in 1772 had been ſent by the Preſident and Council of Madras

Madras with a party of the Company's forces, at the requeſt of the Nabob of Arcot, to reduce to obedience ſome refractory vaſſals: the Major met with a reſiſtance he little expected, and was compelled in the exerciſe of his commiſſion to acts of ſeverity that ſhocked his feelings; and muſt ſhock thoſe of every reader of the letter. But to bring this home as a charge againſt the Preſident and Council, we ſhould know what impreſſion Major Beaujour's letter made on them, and what orders they ſent in conſequence.

The liberty an officer took to remonſtrate with his principals, plainly ſhews his belief that ſuch ſeverities were not in their contemplation when they gave the orders; and ſuppoſe the circumſtances of the rebellion were ſuch as required perſeverance, have not ſimilar meaſures been purſued by the adminiſtration of this country with regard to America? Let the inhabitants of Æſopus, and other parts of America, deſcant upon the oppreſſion of Britiſh government, and they will probably dreſs up a more melancholy picture of woe and civilized barbariſm, than any which the India Company's records can warrant, or the defamers of their ſervants invent. In order ſtill more to encreaſe the clamour againſt the India Company, it has been inſinuated, that they are become a burden to the public: the Secretary of State and Chancellor of the Exchequer in one Houſe, Lord Carliſle in another, tauntingly aſk, if the people will be ſatisfied to have their

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reſources exhauſted in the maintenance of a monopolizing body; who, with great revenues are by miſmanagement brought to the brink of ruin themſelves; and if parliament does not timely interpoſe, will in all probability accelerate the downfall of this country? In ſupport of ſuch an appeal, the public ſhould have been told to what extent the company had heretofore been an incumbrance to the people; and in what mode they are now imploring the aid of Parliament; but as this information has been with-held, it will not be improper to ſhew how little foundation there is for theſe inſinuations. In the beginning of the war of 1755, the Company could not obtain any force for the protection of India; the Directors acquainted the ſervants abroad that their application for that purpoſe had been unſucceſsful; and that their only dependence was on their prudence and ſpirited exertions. Every body muſt recollect that they were not diſappointed; and and that ſuch was the opinion which the great Lord Chatham and the Parliament of thoſe days entertained of the Company's efforts in in the common cauſe, that an aid was voted to the Company of £20,000, and continued for three or four years. In return, as it were, for this ſmall aſſiſtance, theCompany in the fifteen years ſubſequent to the attainment of their territorial poſſeſſions in Bengal, paid into the exchequer for cuſtoms and exciſe £6, 447,168 ſterling more than they had done in the fifteen years preceding thoſe ſucceſſes; the

whole ſum which the public in that term received from the Company being £19,890,616 ſterling on thoſe accounts. It likewiſe appears that on the ground of participation in the territorial revenues, Government during that period received £2,169,398. 18s. 2d. ſterling, which is equal to a dividend of £4. 10. 0. *per cent. per annum*, on the capital ſtock of the Company for fifteen years; whilſt the proprietors in the ſame term have been allowed an encreaſe in their dividends only equal to 4s. 6d. *per cent. per annum*, over and above what their commercial profits had uſually afforded; and yet the Company had diſburſed in military expences and fortifications £9,551,549 ſterling, without any pecuniary aid from the public, except the £80,000 above-mentioned: for though, in the latter part of the war of 1755, a conſiderable marine as well as land force was ſent out by Government, for the purpoſe of driving the French from their ſettlements in India; yet the Company ſhould not be upbraided with the charge ſo brought upon the public; as they are as much entitled to the general protection of the ſtate as any other part of its ſubjects. From that time to 1773, the Company did not receive any aſſiſtance from Government; but on the contrary, contributed largely to the neceſſities of the ſtate; and at that period, the only boon aſked of Parliament was, that they would lend the Company, diſtreſſed with large and unexpected

pected drafts from India, the ſum of £1,400000 ſterling; which requeſt, though it was complied with, was yet uſed by the miniſters of that day, as a pretext to extort from the Company a large ſhare of their patronage. They aſſumed the nomination of Governor-General and Supreme Council, and alſo eſtabliſhed a new Court of Judicature, both at the expence of the Company. In two years, or three at moſt, the Company repaid this ſum; and being now again become ſuppliants to Parliament, they do not requeſt that the military expences in India may be defrayed out of the public treaſury, but that a debt of near a million of money, now due from the Company to the ſtate for cuſtoms and exciſe, may be procraſtinated for ſome certain time; and that Parliament would either lend them as much more, or allow them to borrow it. This is the extent of the great burden with which the Company are now overwhelming the public; nor has any other aſſiſtance been ever granted them, tho' they have annually paid for fifteen years together, near a million and a half into the public treaſury. It is very fit to remind the nation that the preſent diſtreſſes of the Company, which are but temporary, have chiefly been brought on by the late war.---The encreaſed war price of freight, and the augmentation of tonnage, for his Majeſty's troops and naval ſtores, have occaſioned an extraordinary charge to the Company of £700,000: they loſt a very large ſum by the capture of

their ſhips by the combined fleet; and, to depreſs them ſtill more, labouring under ſuch unuſual and heavy burthens, their ſhips have not regularly returned with cargoes to Europe, having been delayed by attendance on the King's ſhips, or in military expeditions in India, to the great detriment of the Company's finances in England.

Beneficial, then, as the company has proved to the nation, unburthenſome as it certainly has been, it is not fair to alarm the people with an idea, that they are to be oppreſſed with taxes for the ſupport of a monopolizing company, when there is no cauſe to dread ſuch an event. The nation ought to be made fully ſenſible of the great advantages derived from India, that they may ponder awhile, before they commit ſo great a ſtake to the management of men moſtly ſtrangers to thoſe affairs. Since the act of 1773, the miniſters of the Crown have had a legal right to interfere in the Government of India; and when they thought fit, have exerciſed their controlling power: it ſurely therefore is not juſt to attribute the miſmanagement ſolely to the Company; the miniſters ſhould come in for their ſhare of reſponſibility and reproach; and the public thence learn, not to form too ſanguine expectations of the wiſe meaſures that will be purſued by lodging more authority in adminiſtration.

The idea of extending that liberty which we ourſelves enjoy to millions of people, delights

delights a generous public; but poſſibly the inhabitants of another hemiſphere, unuſed to reaſon upon the beſt poſſible ſyſtem and government, and bred up under a deſpotic authority, may not have feelings ſimilar to ours. They perhaps may be affected with deep rooted attachments to the laws and government under which they have lived, and not wiſh relief in the mode we are diſpoſed to afford:—the inhabitants of Bengal probably have not in any inſtance ſuffered more from Britiſh authority than in the attempt to ſubject them to an Engliſh court of judicature, where forms in many caſes ſeem to take place of ſubſtantial juſtice. The laws themſelves have proved ſources of more grievous oppreſſion than they ever felt from the hand of deſpotiſm, and that at a period too, when they are called on to admire the benevolence of the Britiſh legiſlature in the communication of their laws to India. Certainly a native of Bengal will not eaſily diſcriminate between the ſuperior excellence of Britiſh laws, and the evils which they introduce, from the mode in which they are diſpenſed; but they will all remember that the execution of Nundocomar was one of the firſt effects of the new ſyſtem; and when they ſee a man of his conſequence ſuffering like a common malefactor by the operation of thoſe laws, they will not be eaſily convinced that they are the ſureſt guardians of their own lives and property. Tormented by the quirks of law and lawyers, the poor native may often perhaps

haps have ſighed for the adminiſtration of juſtice in the old way, when it was ſimply and equally diſpenſed to all. Regulations that may give ſecurity to property, that may ſubſtantially protect the people from oppreſſion, which may check that ſpirit of enterprize and conqueſt which has of late produced ſo much miſchief; but above all, ſuch as will effectually prevent European adventurers from entering into the military or civil ſervice of any native prince of India—ſuch ſort of regulations, originating not in a ſpirit of party and prejudice, but in the true principles of moderation, Juſtice and ſound Policy will ſhower down bleſſings upon that country, and prove not only an honour to us, but a laſting benefit to the commerce of this kingdom, and to the Eaſt India Company.

THE END.